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SOURCE Indochine Sud-Est Asiatique.ORIGIN AND STATUS OF VIET MINH WEAPONS, 1952

An article by Claude Guigues appearing in a Saigon slick-paper monthly, Indochine Sud-Est Asiatique, describes the history and present status of Viet Minh weapons and equipment. The account emphasizes Communist China as the source of Viet Minh armament and technical training. The author comments favorably on the effectiveness of much of the equipment and notes that the Viet Minh lack only tanks, airplanes, and heavy artillery.

Extracts from the article follow.

Information on graphics material is appended.]

The shortage of weapons during the first years of the Indochinese war and present difficulties of supply in certain regions caused the Viet Minh to develop a remarkable production of arms and munitions in straw hut workshops hidden in hamlets, the forest, or the jungle. This type of production spread to all parts of the country, but was facilitated in the North, where power sources such as wood, peat, and electricity could be employed which were not available in the South. Occupation of the Vinh railway depots in north central Vietnam and temporary control of Vinh Yen in North Vietnam contributed greatly to the Viet Minh cause, as stocks of raw materials were stored at these bases and facilities for treating special steel and pyrotechnical workshops were established. One principal handicap of the Viet Minh effort was their almost total lack of special steel and their difficulty in finding explosives. It must be recognized that the explosives which the Public Works Service allotted to quarry owners and the potassium chlorate which was granted without controls to slaughterhouses constituted materials strongly coveted by the Viet Minh.

Stocks of Japanese bombs, which had been immersed in the Don Nai River, 30 kilometers from Saigon, were recovered by the rebels. Divers packed explosives in fishing nets fastened to logs which were floated downstream under the eyes of French Vietnamese guards.

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The Viet Minh have been able to establish hundreds of workshops where, with recovered scrap iron and contraband, they have copied the various weapons in their possession. They have also invented new arms adapted to the exigencies of their warfare.

Although the number of these workshops has decreased in the North, where Chinese arms are readily available, they have multiplied in south central Vietnam and South Vietnam, in spite of our periodic efforts to destroy them.

At the beginning, Viet Minh installations were directed by foreign technicians composed of a few "benevolent" Japanese instructors and a few French-educated Vietnamese deserters. These technicians taught school and their evening courses included more than literature or Marxist doctrine.

If these factories manufactured only a few complicated weapons, they had a great deal of success in the construction of simple arms. They have even reached an almost inspired level of perfection with mines. They have such a large quantity of traction and snare mines equipped with electric or compression fuses that it is impossible to enumerate them.

In South Vietnam, they have specialized in marine and river mines which have given much trouble to French Union troops

Among mines recently developed, there is the "F. T." [full name not given] with a shaped charge, which is fastened to the end of a bamboo cane and placed against the wall of a guard tower or the fence of a post where it can damage the garrison and may totally destroy it. When the installation to be taken is surrounded by earthworks, barbed wire, or strongly protected by machine gun fire, sometimes "suicide volunteers," fasten explosives to their waists and throw themselves against the defenses in order to blow them up. These tactics were used in the attack of the Tu Vu post on 10 December 1951.

There is also a flat charge mine, in the shape of a truncated cone weighing 50 kilograms, which is ignited by battery made up of 200 flashlight cells placed 20 meters from the mine. The "bangalore" is composed of an explosive packed in bamboo, not a metal tube, and has a wide bursting radius. Since the Colonial Road No. 5 battles, mines encased in wood or cardboard have made their appearance, and as all metal parts have been abolished, they are not susceptible to mine detectors.

All types of grenades, from the common grain fragmentation grenade to projectiles launched by rifles, are becoming more and more effective.

Besides these orthodox weapons, there are the mortar-launched "flyingbombs" of local invention. They possess an enormous head, a wooden tailshaft and a stabilizing tail and are loaded, wings included, into the barrel of the mortar. These bombs, possessing only moderate effectiveness, have a short range of about 150 meters.

Mortars have been very carefully studied by the Viet Minh. Numerous models have been made, but the workshops seem to have been geared to the production of mortars from 50-mm to 185-mm caliber. Although to achieve real precision the inside boring of the barrel must be extremely delicate (an error of one-tenth of one millimeter can spoil the aim because of varying internal pressure), Viet Minh mortars are quite effective. However, enemy technicians have never succeeded in calculating the speed of the projectile in the barrel.

Since 1948, the Viet Minh have manufactured bazookas, both imitations of the standard type, fired from the shoulder (60-mm) or a heavier type (75-mm) mounted on a tripod. In general the quality of the bazookas is good. Because of the difficulties in obtaining the necessary steel, machine guns and automatic

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rifles of completely local manufacture are extremely rare. However, the Viet Minh have exerted great efforts in the construction of the submachine guns. They play a role of primary importance in close combat, very frequently on close terrain. Good copies of a large number of known models have been found. The Sten gun is clearly preferred because of its simplicity and ease of imitation.

On the other hand, the Viet Minh rifle is quite mediocre; no matter what its model or caliber. The explanation normally given is the difficulty in boring a rather long barrel, making springs and all parts of special steel. In fact, the Viet Minh do not give the impression of attaching much value to this weapon. Their experiments parallel the stages in the European development of this weapon. The caliber most often manufactured is the 7.7 which employs a fairly common type of bullet (French "36" rifle). Unusual 16-mm guns, with nonrifled large barrels have been discovered. In 1951, an operation in South Vietnam uncovered an important blueprint dated 1948. It was used for the manufacture of a rifle which had to be loaded through a small hole in the breech and the bullet threaded through the barrel. An external pin with fuse released by a trigger was necessary to secure an explosion.

The greatest imagination seems to have been employed in the development of position weapons. Generally they are simplified copies of Western weapons. Some of these local "creations" have a simple loading mechanism, and to load them they must be raised up. Such is the 9-mm; in order to load it, it is necessary to raise the barrel, place a shell in the breech, and close it.

The Viet Minh have attempted to replace standard artillery pieces, much too heavy for them, with light artillery. They have invented half dozen "recoilless cannons" which do not require any complicated mountings. The S. K. Z., an abbreviation for "Sung Khong Giat" (recoilless gun) is now well-known throughout Indochina.

This short study should not be closed without mentioning two curiosities in the Viet Minh arsenal. The "blow dart" tube which was discovered at Saigon-Cholon is composed of a projectile poisoned with curare and guarantees a discreet and silent assassination. The second curiosity is an odd weapon whose purpose has not been determined by armament experts. It is a Viet Minh "secret weapon" in the true sense of the term, even defying description.

The Viet Minh formerly fought in North Vietnam with just as much an array of disparate equipment as in the South. During the past year, however, the Northern units have been able to pass on this heterocelite material to their regional and people's troops as the regular troops became supplied with standardized equipment.

The firepower of their infantry divisions (204th, 308th, 312th, 316th, 320th, and 325th) and their heavy division (351st Artillery and Engineers) has increased at a staggering speed, thanks to direct Chinese Communist aid. It can be stated that Viet Minh firepower now practically equals that of the French-Vietnamese troops.

At present, the regular troops in Viet Bac and Intertones 3 and 4, a region equivalent to North Vietnam, are entirely equipped with weapons delivered from China. At the same time that this absolute potential is increasing, standardization again increases their firepower by permitting a continual replenishing of ammunition.

It is rather difficult to determine the original source of the equipment. Chinese arsenals have an excellent production quality. They copy perfectly all foreign models: Russian, Japanese, and particularly American. The presence, moreover, of large quantities of Czech guns is certain.

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If heavy artillery has not made an appearance, it is only due to the Viet Minh lack of sufficient means of transport. They must employ 100 men to service a 75 [mm] piece, which explains why, in addition to the difficulty of ammunition supply, that they are only moderately interested in the capture of these guns, except in the case of a stabilized front such as on the Black River. Their heavy artillery consists of a few mounted 70-mm and recoilless 57-mm pieces.

Antiaircraft defense is new to the war in North Vietnam, and it is costing the French certain plane losses. Antiaircraft defense is assured by 20-mm guns, 13.2-mm and 12.7-mm machine guns and 7.7-mm machine guns, usually of Chinese make (American copy). No heavy antiaircraft artillery has been detected.

China furnishes everything. The only limitation to this material aid is the amount Viet Minh troops can absorb. They are almost saturated, although the number of weapons does not seem enormous. It must not be forgotten that the Viet Minh have a perfect knowledge of the terrain and in most of their maneuvers can approach much closer to their objective than French-Vietnamese troops. They almost always go into action with less firepower than their enemy. Utilizing their medium-sized intervention battalions of 700 to 800 men, it is usual to see only 500 or even only 400 in action.

These figures are obviously not fixed. A Viet Minh asset is their flexibility of formation.

The relative superiority of the French-Vietnamese forces rest in their aviation and artillery, real terrors to enemy soldiers. The blows which they have struck in the last months have hit the enemy's human potential severely.

In addition to material aid, Communist China has opened training camps for Vietnamese officers and men. These are training centers in all arms except armored and air forces. One of the divisions in Hoa Binh recently returned from a "pilgrimage to the sources."

In conclusion, China trains the specialists and furnishes the material needed by the troops, and it would seem that she could hardly do more at the present, given the degree of saturation of the Viet Minh troops. Actually, Communist China will not become a greater menace in the future; however, she is none the less a serious handicap; she trains the technicians whom the Viet Minh can expend because their replacement is assured. She guarantees replacement of weapons and constant provision of ammunition supplies.

The following tables indicate the quantity and types of Viet Minh armament.

Table 1 Viet Minh Infantry Weapons in North Vietnam

| | 1 Jan 51 (pieces) | 1 Jan 52 (pieces) |
|---------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Regular Army Troops | 25,600 | 50,000 |
| Regional Troops | 10,000 | 16,000 |
| People's Troops | 5,000* | 12,000 |

* Excludes weapons of police

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Table 2. Comparison of Armament of a French Union Infantry Battalion and a Viet Minh Infantry Battalion

| | <u>French</u> | <u>Viet Minh</u> |
|--------------------|------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Automatic pistols | 30 | 60 |
| Machine pistols | 133 | 200 |
| Rifles or carbines | 624 | 300 (rifles) |
| Automatic rifles | 41 | 20 |
| Mortars | 4 (81-mm) 8 (60-mm) | 8 (no caliber given) 3 (S.K.Z.) |
| Machine guns | 8 | 6 |
| Grenade launchers | 36 | 3 (Bazookas) |
| Total | 884 | 600 |

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Table 3. 9th Regiment, 304th Division, Viet Minh Army

| | <u>At Beginning of 1949</u> | <u>At Beginning of 1951</u> |
|-------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Composed of | 6 battalions | 3 battalions and regimental troops |
| Total strength | 1,800 men | 3,584 |
| Armament | | |
| Mortars | 2 | 24 |
| 75-mm cannons | 2 | -- |
| 25-mm cannons | 1 | -- |
| S.K.Z. cannons | -- | 9 |
| Machine guns | 2 | 18 |
| Automatic rifles | 10 | 60 |
| Rifles | -- | 900 |
| Machine pistols | -- | 600 |
| Automatic pistols | -- | 180 |
| Bazookas | -- | 9 |
| Grenades | -- | 15,000 |

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GRAPHICS MATERIAL AVAILABLE

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Requests for copies of, or further information on, the photographs described herein should be addressed to Graphics Register, CIA, by referring to report number and item number.

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1. Location: Vietnam, Viet Minh Zone

Caption and Description: (1) "Poisoned Dart Gun, (2) Pistol Loaded by a Changeable Barrel, (3) Composite Weapon of Undetermined Use, (4) Chinese Automatic Gun, (5) A Copy of US Machine Gun, (6) 81-mm Mortar With Changeable Firing Pin"

Photograph Description: Size, 11 1/4 x 2 1/2 inches; good; slick paper

Source: Indochine Sud-Est Asiatique, Saigon, July 1952, page 54

Repository of Source Document: CIA

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2. Location: Vietnam, Viet Minh Zone

Caption and Description: "Nguyen Ngoc Xuan, Deputy Director of Armament Service, Visits a Workshop." Photograph shows the Viet Minh official inspecting a lathe

Photograph Description: Size, 3 3/4 x 3 1/4 inches; good; slick paper

Source: Indochine Sud-Est Asiatique, Saigon, July 1952, page 55

Repository of Source Document: CIA

3. Location: Vietnam, Viet Minh Zone

Caption and Description: "Interior of a Jungle Workshop." Photograph shows Viet Minh workers operating lathes

Photograph Description: Size, 4 x 3 1/4 inches, good; slick paper

Source: Indochine Sud-Est Asiatique, Saigon, July 1952, page 55

Repository of Source Document: CIA

4. Location: Vietnam, Central Vietnam, Thanh Hoa

Caption and Description: "Weapons and Ammunition Manufactured in a Workshop in Thanh Hoa." Photograph shows an exhibit of armament, including mortars, mortar shells, grenades, rockets, rocket launcher, etc.

Photograph Description: Size, 4 1/4 x 3 1/4 inches; good; slick paper

Source: Indochine Sud-Est Asiatique, Saigon, July 1952, page 55

Repository of Source Document: CIA

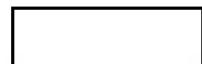
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5. Location: Vietnam, Viet Minh Zone

Caption and Description: "Antitank Mine." Photograph shows a French soldier neutralizing an antitank mine

Photograph Description: Size, 4 1/4 x 6 inches; good; slick paper

Source: Indochine Sud-Est Asiatique, Saigon, July 1952, page 56

Repository of Source Document: CIA

6. Location: Vietnam, Viet Minh Zone

Caption and Description: "Bamboo Mine." Photograph shows the comparative size of the mine with a match box

Photograph Description: Size, 2 x 2 1/2 inches; good; slick paper

Source: Indochine Sud-Est Asiatique, Saigon, July 1952, page 56

Repository of Source Document: CIA

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7. Location: Vietnam, Viet Minh Zone

Caption and Description: "Antitank Mine." Photograph shows the size of the mine compared with a match box

Photograph description: Size, 2 x 2 1/2 inches; good; slick paper

Source: Indochine Sud-Est Asiatique, Saigon, July 1952, page 56

Repository of Source Document: CIA

8. Location: Vietnam, Viet Minh Zone

Caption and Description: "Recoilless Cannon"

Photograph Description: Size, 2 x 2 1/2 inches; good; slick paper

Source: Indochine Sud-Est Asiatique, Saigon, July 1952, page 57

Repository of Source Document: CIA

9. Location: Vietnam, Viet Minh Zone

Caption and Description: "Recoilless Cannon"

Photograph Description: Size, 2 x 2 1/2 inches, good; slick paper

Source: Indochine Sud-Est Asiatique, Saigon, July 1952, page 57

Repository of Source Document: CIA

~~REF ID: A6512~~

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10. Location: Vietnam, Viet Minh Zone

Caption and Description: "Rocket Launcher." Photograph shows Viet Minh soldiers loading the launcher with a rocket

Photograph Description: Size, 4 1/4 x 6 inches; good; slick paper

Source: Indochine Sud-Est Asiatique, Saigon, July 1952, page 57

Repository of Source Document: CIA

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